Wordeater#69

Joliet Junior College 1989

WORDEATER 69 STAFF

Sue Cherven, Bob Loewe, Maria Mellinger, Nels Nelson, John Stobart,
David L. Sullivan, Kim Vollmer

In order to get a selection published in this issue, four of the above had to vote for acceptance. For the award winners, only John Stobart is responsible.

AWARDS

POETRY:
$20 to Nels Nelson
$ 5 to Kim Vollmer

PROSE:
$10 to Norma Dodge
$10 to Clariece Henne
$ 5 to Walter Coffey

COVERS:
$20 to Dave Gardiner

Manuscripts or cover designs for

WORDEATER 71

must be submitted to John Stobart in room C-1069 by:

February 23, 1990

Manuscripts will not be returned and should be typed.

NEXT DEADLINES:

February 23, 1990
April 12, 1990

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Sherry Gunderman

11:52 A.M.

Brown eyes
Brown hair
Khaki coat
Red scarf
Darted through the crowd.
The future
was lost
in that brief moment
in the narrow hallway.

****

Nels Nelson

LATE

This is not a poem about non-stick cooking pots.
This is not a poem about canvas luggage,
Nor is it about a French maiden's underthings
(Although it very easily could be).
This poem's name could be translated as Randall,
And it sometimes wears a dashiki on Thursdays.
It doesn't shop at department stores,
And is trying to quit smoking.
This poem doesn't have any fond childhood memories,
And is most definitely not about rainbow-colored windsocks.
This poem refuses to acknowled any poemness it might exude.
The one thing this poem does proudly represent,
Preaching its wisdom on every soap box,
Yet refusing vehemently to represent said soap box,
Is the internationally revered hobby-horse.

****

Maria Mellinger

IN A MATTER OF HOURS

In a matter of hours
Last night's freedom escaped.
It crept out the window
When we weren't looking.
Left the comforter in a crumble,
And awoke the alarm clock,
Which screamed its shocked reply.
Out of fear we
Embraced routine
Instead of each other.

*****

J. Ardith Cox

TIMES OF CHANGE

Struggling in the bonds of life,
Wishing to be free.
Young hearts battling with their minds,
Fighting desperately.

Wandering through this world of hurt,
Showing little fear.
LOVING, losing, all they know,
Holding back each tear.

Facing problems every day,
Boldly taking stands.
Never giving in for less,
Keeping their demands.

Looking for the perfect love,
A search that has no end.
Hoping to repair the breaks,
In hearts that cannot mend.

Caught between the young and old,
Living in their prime.
Wounds received along Life's path,
Are healed by only Time.

****

Nels Nelson

WHAT IS REAL ON DECEMBER 30, 1988

A new car?
No, that's not it.
Tomorrow?
Could tomorrow be real?
Nope.
Not even a hot bath is real
Anymore,
Nor a bed.
I'm broke in San Francisco
In a rain that reminds me of a
Head full of mucous,
And I just want
A pair of god damned socks,
Reality is a dream of warm feet
Twenty-five hundred miles from home.

****

Shonda Talerico

THE REALITY OF EXISTENCE

Touching his finger to my chin, he gently lifts it, so my eyes meet his. Inside them there is the same look, seen once so long ago, but far from forgotten. His eyes bore into mine.

"I remember," he says. "I remember this feeling that I shared with you so long ago. I was such a fool, I'm sorry. I never meant to hurt you. I just didn't know what I was feeling until now. Shon, I still love you."

I clasp his hands and press them to my breast. My heart is pounding wildly, it feels as if it will leap out of my chest or cease beating altogether.

"I have waited for you to say those words to me again," I utter breathlessly.

He smiled and gently stroked my hair. My joyous tears stain my face. These tears don't travel over unfamiliar territory, but they are fresh and new. Emotions nearly forgotten in two years wash through me.

His kisses are soft and sweet. They rain upon my skin like a fresh shower, a shower that washes away all of my negative feelings. His passion rekindles sensations that I hadn't experienced in years. At once, I was fifteen again, with my stomach in knots.

My nerves tingle with excitement. The moistness is cleansing me, washing away two long years of loneliness. I am ready to try again.

He draws me into his arms, and I can smell him. I want to become his smell, his skin, his whole being. I want him. I want to become him.

My lips and tongue run down his neck. He tastes a bit salty, he always did. He tastes like love. Love is oozing out of every pore. He is vulnerable as he opens himself to me.

I am ready to receive him. I can feel the love that he is bestowing on me. It's warmer than the sunlight that streams through the gauzy curtains and spills over our young bodies on the bed.

Our clothing falls away like softness. He undresses me so tenderly, as if he is performing a ritual of love.

I am pure. I am whole. We are one.

We are joined by our existence through our souls. My body aches with emotions that are stronger than hatred or any evil, for my feelings are of pure love.

He is stroking my legs, but they aren't a part of me. I'm floating in space. I'm a billion atoms mixing in his atoms. He has entered my space, and I have entered his.

I can feel him throbbing harder and hotter than anything. Nothing matters but this reality. Nothingis more real than our actual existence. We appear as one.

We are trekking up the mountain, our own mountain of love, joy and ecstasy. I am so absorbed in him that I cannot find myself, and he cannot find himself. There are no separate entities, but one existence.

We explode. Suddenly, I am losing my balance. I am hurtling through space, which only contains myself. He is gone. I cannot breathe, I don't want to see...

My cheek is damp. I guess that my tears awakened me. My eyes grope in the darkness. The sharp realization hits me: we are not one.

I close my eyes and curl myself into a ball under his heavy, unyielding arm. I match my breathing to his rhythm. I can feel his heart beating against me, but it's not mine. He doesn't love me. But I'll wait for the day when he'll love me again.

****

Blake Axelson

THE ULTIMATE IMAGINEER

"Disneyworld! I don't want to go there, that place if for little kids!" I screamed at my mother.

"But Joe," she said. "It's a family vacation area, there'll be lots to do in Florida."

"Sure, Florida, the state where senior citizens go to die. There's nothing for me there, much less at Disneyworld, which is for people who are Lori's age!"

"I heard that!" my sister screamed from her room and marched into the kitchen. "I'm a full-grown woman, I'm almost ten years old!"

"If you think that's old, you must thing I'm a grandfather," I said.

"Oh, be quiet!" she said. "You don't know about women anyway." Then Lori stormed back to her room.

"Mom?" I asked. "Why can't we go someplace exciting like Las Vegas or Hawaii?"

"Because we're going to Florida, case closed." So that was it. I was stuck with it. There was no use trying to fight it any longer.

"Besides," my mother said, "you never know, you may meet some girl down there who's just as bummed out about being there as you are, then you two could go around together." I hadn't thought of that. It would be nice if I could get out of hanging with my parents.

"So, Mom, when do we leave?" I asked.

"Thursday, when school is out, seems like

(continued)

you changed your attitude pretty quick."

"Yeah, well, I figure I may be able to tolerate it a bit more if it works out okay." Of course, my mom knew why I became interested so fast, as mothers always know the reasons behind their children's actions.

So off we went, winging down to the land of oranges and alligators. Not knowing what to expect, I sat and wondered if this vacation could actually be worth something, or if it would be of memorable value.

Arriving sooner than I had hoped, we picked up our bags, and headed for Disneyworld. As the sun beat down on our run-down rented car, I soon fell asleep and didn't wake up until we were at the hotel.

All the next day, we went around the theme park. We hit the haunted house, the submarine ride, and Epcot Center. By this time, Lori was ecstatic. She jumped about screaming, "Does someone here have a camera? We might be able to see Mickey Mouse."

"Yeah," I said drolly. "I don't know if I can keep my composure up if that happens."

"You are so immature!" she said.

"At least I'm not stupid like you!" I returned. Lori shook her head. Back at the park, we covered every ride, attraction, and restaurant we missed before, until finally we arrived at the cream of the crop. the ultimate thrill ride, the ride that put Disneyworld on the map, the one, the only, (except in California), "Space Mountain"!

"Let's go on the space ride!" I yelled with surprising enthusiasm.

"Are you nuts?" asked my dad. "People have died from heart attacks on that thing!"

"Those are just old people, Dad, besides, they would have dropped dead at the fall of a pin."

"You can go by yourself, Joe. We'll sit this one out," said my mother. I didn't even ask Lori, her face had turned white looking at the pavilion that housed the coaster. So, off I went to attempt to get some excitement out of this vacation.

After what seemed like an eternity of strolling through steel guard rails, I finally arrived within seeing distance of the boarding area. In front of me was a girl who I hadn't noticed until now. She wore a red sweater and stone washed jeans, and had long black hair.

"You been on this ride before?" I asked. No answer. "You like this ride?" I tried again.

"Huh? Oh yeah, it's my favorite," she answered slowly.

"I could really use a partner. Do you want to sit with me?"

"Sure, we're up next," she said. And we were. I could hardly believe it, the time passed so quick while I talked to her. The ride was pretty excellent, a little primitive compared to what's out today, but the dark made it more exciting.

When it was over, I heard her get up and walk out of the tram. "I didn't get your name. Wha--" but she was gone. I went to an attendant operating the ride and asked, "Did you see a girl in a red sweater and stone washed jeans go by?"

He looked me hard and said, "You trying to be smart, boy!"

Surprised, I answered, "No, wh-why do you ask?"

"You know why! We don't need jerks like you!"

"But I only asked if you've seen her."

"If you don't stop it, Son, I'll call Security and have you removed."

"All right, all right, I'll leave." I wondered what happened to the Disney reputation of being polite to guests. Outside, I met my parents.

"So how was it?" asked my dad.

"Pretty good. I even met a girl in there."

"You don't say!" My mom interjected. "What's her name?"

"She left before I could--hey, there she is!" She was walking back into the ride. "She obviously loves Space Mountain," I told them.

"Hmmm...," Dad mumbled. "Maybe you'll run into her again."

"Yeah, maybe." I thought rather blank things for a while, and in bed later that night, I decided I would return to Space Mountain the next morning and try to locate "Madame X."

"Rise and shine!" My dad's voice boomed across the room. "What are we going to do today?"

"I wanna go to Epcot!" Lori yelled.

"I could use some clothes," Mom added.

"I'd like to ride Space Mountain again, maybe three or four times," I answered.

"Bull-loney! He just wants to meet his girlfriend!" Lori said defiantly.

"Girlfriend my ass, I only met her yesterday!"

"Joe! Watch your language in from of your sister!" Mom yelled.

"Enough of this! said Dad. "We all have our places to go, so let's do it. Come on, Lori, I'll take you to Epcot." So we all took off on our own, as if on individual quests in search of buried treasure.

I arrived at Space Mountain in the late morning. I looked all around for the red sweater or dark hair, but found nothing. the attendant from the

(continued)

day before stared at me coldly as I moved through the line, as if I was under suspicion for something.

On the way out after I finished the ride I saw her approaching the entrance.

"Hey, how's it going?" I said.

"Oh, fine, how are you?" she answered as slow as always.

"Are you with your parents, or are you here alone?" I asked.

"No, I'm just...here." It was a strange answer, yet this was a strange girl.

I'm here on Spring Break, though I'd rather be in Hawaii," I said. She laughed and started to speak.

"Would you like to go on with me again?"

"I'd love to, but I have to get back. I'm meeting my family for lunch. Maybe later tonight I could meet you someplace," I said

"Why not right here?" she answered.

"Is this the only place you visit when you're here?" I asked humorously.

"Practically, yes."

"Great! I'll come around nine."

"Sounds fine." Then she walked inside. I then smacked my head. Why didn't I ask her name. Would I always have to refer to her as "she," "girl," "woman in stone washed pants"? Well, it didn't matter. I'd try to remember to ask her tonight. Never in my sixteen years of life did I ever think this vacation would turn interesting, but it did.

"So, Joe, how was your day?" Dad asked.

"Pretty good. I saw what's-her-face," I said.

"You don't know her name yet!"

"No, I...er, forgot to ask her."

"Again? You'd think she'd have introduced herself by now."

"Well," I said, "I'm meeting her later tonight. Maybe I'll find out then."

"I hope so," said Dad. "She must go by some kind of name." All through lunch my mind was on the Queen of the Coaster, but then what else was new. Later that night, I went to meet her at the park. Arriving at nine on the dot, I sat and waited on a bench just outside the ride.

Hours came and hours went, but there was no sign of her. I began to grow impatient as I started to drift off. "Meet in front of the Mountain...nine o'clock...why'd she have to stand me up...stupid bitch!"

"Hey, Buddy, let's move it! Get back to you hotel." I awoke to find a security guard looking down at me.

"What time is it?" I yawned.

"One a.m. The park's closing," answered the guard.

"Is everybody gone?"

"Yeah, they don't let people hang around after closing time, not after that accident last year."

"Accident? What accident?" I asked.

"Oh, a few kids who drank too much thought it would be fun to put a trashed girl on her favorite ride, and see how she liked waking up in a roller coaster, Space Mountain to be exact."

"So what happened?" I asked with curiosity.

"The girl...was asleep, she wasn't aware of what was going on, and...well, it was just an awful tragedy."

I pieced together what was told, and hoped it wasn't what it sounded like.

"What did the girl look like?" I asked.

"Hmmm, maybe, I believe she, well I know she had stone washed pants, because that's the first thing I saw when we found...let's stop right there and have you go back, it's late enough already." He was obviously becoming unnerved.

"Just one more thing. What was her name?" I asked with some hesitation.

"It was Wendy, Wendy Dreslin," answered the guard.

"Did they get her out?"

"The body? Well, of course! If you want to get gory about it, there's probably some of her left, but nobody's perfect in this kind of...recovery of a victim.

With this in mind, I decided what I had to do. We had one more day at Disneyworld, and after I filled my requirements for family interaction, I would go to find Wendy and let her know I knew about her.

Arriving at the hotel, my parents asked how the night went, and where the hell I had been. "Time just flew. It was great. I'll say goodbye to her tomorrow." I lied through my teeth, and jumped into bed before they could ask anything more. Early next morning, I rose up quickly, had breakfast, contributed my two-cents' worth of family sharing, then headed to Tomorrowland, home of Space Mountain.

I searched through hordes of people going in and going out. Only after I was ready to give up did I see her. "Wendy!" I called as she turned with a look of incredible surprise. She approached me still wearing the shocked expression, which began to scare me now.

"How...did you find out?" she asked.

"I...I...asked a guard when you didn't show up last night, by the way, where were you?"

She looked down, sighed, and said,

(continued)

"I...didn't want to hurt your feelings, but I'm stuck here. I'll always be here. I'm a part of the network of Space Mountain."

"I don't understand." And I really didn't.

"I died here, tragically, and I can never leave because parts of my mortal self still exist. I didn't show up last night because I may have grown closer to you, and that would mean I would have to, ultimately, cause you pain in leaving me. You have been the only person I've appeared to, somehow, I just knew you'd understand me."

"I do feel sorry for you, and I wish we could have been friends."

"We will be," she said. "We will be." She then handed me a piece of folded paper and said, "Look at this when you get home. Whenever you see it, you'll remember me." Then she was gone.

I came back in a daze and left with my family for the airport. Flying over the country, there was a sensation of peace all around. I only wish Wendy could share some of it with me, but of course, this wasn't to be.

Arriving home later that night, we were all very tired, and when I put my jeans aside, I remembered the paper. I pulled it out, and on it were Wendy's initials. At first I didn't know the significance, but then I saw the ambiguity and laid down to cry myself to sleep.

****

Sherry Gunderman

OPTIMISM

The music
from two separate generations
echoed
in unison.
And there was the night
and the stars shone
and the wind whispered
promises
that would never come true.
And the youngsters
smiled
starry smiles of optimism
and the elders gave them
looks of worried empathy
in the sunbeams
of their infinite knowledge.
And we shook our heads
in disbelief
and opened the window to reality
and enjoyed the present.

****

Rich Goberville

INNOCENCE

I peered into the casket, not really knowing what to expect. And there she was, my grandmother. She looked beautiful as she does on Christmas morning with her hair all done up and her makeup put on so well. I looked at her eyes that seemed to be sealed shut. Then I looked down at her mouth. She seemed to have a little grin that looked sort of funny. The more I looked, the funnier her mouth seemed, until suddenly I burst out laughing. I just couldn't help myself. I've never seen her so still. Usually, when she's sleeping, I can see her eyes flicker, or her mouth move just a little. But this time, nothing at all. I almost felt like tickling her toes until she woke up laughing too. (That's what I always did when she fell asleep on the couch at home.) The thought of tickling her made me laugh even more. I tried to stifle my laugh because, for some reason, I could sense that this wasn't the place to be laughing. But still, the laughter came out. I looked down at Grandma again, waiting for her to wake, due to my loudness, but she continued to lay still.

I turned away, figuring that I'd better not wake her anyway. Then I saw a strange sight. My mom and my grandpa were in tears. They were hugging each other and giving each other comfort. I wondered what bothered them so much. Then I heard my grandpa say to my mom, "She died knowing she lived a good life."

What did he mean, "died"? Isn't that like on "Tom & Jerry" where, if they get run over by a car, they can just blow themselves up again? Grandma can get better. What's the big deal on "death"? Suddenly, from the painful look on my mom's face, I could tell that death was something more than I ever imagined. I began to wonder if I would ever hear my grandmother's laughter again. I wondered if I would ever visit her house and have her make my favorite cookies and have her push me on her tire swing as I ate them. I wondered if she would ever teach me more games that she used to play when she was my age.

I turned to the casket and slowly shuffled towards it, somehow knowing that I wouldn't see the same image I saw the first time. That short walk to the casket seemed to take forever and when I finally reached it, I wasn't sure if I wanted to look inside. With my last bit of courage I had left, I looked inside, and this time, I did see something different. This time my tears echoed in silence instead of my laughter. This time, my nine-year-old innocence of death was gone--forever.

****

Jacque Klika

METAMORPHOSIS

A caterpillar
silently spins cocoon.
A new life begins.

Majestic beauty
emerges with folded wings.
Silent grace takes flight.

Canterbury Bells
stand nobly in the sun.
Butterflies alight.

****

Nels Nelson

BIG BOY NOW

A small boy summer, middle west
Small town light-late summer.
What's the world, Momma?
I'm not taking a bath. Can I
Have some ice cream? I don't
Want to pull weeds I hat weeds
They're green. Why can't we just leave them,
Momma? Momma, I got stung!
Don't use the needle to get it, it hurts
Too much, Momma. How long is summer,
Momma? Why was I never bored when I
Was a boy, Momma? Can I still
Be anything I want? Can I be a small boy
Again, wearing the same clothes for days
And not bathing, not caring, and riding
My bike so hard like someone would take it if
I got off, and thinking ice cream is a big deal,
And smiling,
Momma?

****

Kim Vollmer

WHEN

When we are together
there is, I am,
this light.
Shining all around
blocking my view of all
the hates and fears
I've ever known.
When we are together.

******

Jacque Klika

IF

If only I had paused
and thought of what we had...
I might have pictured hands
and how they'd one day paint.
Then I'd have pictured tiny feet
that tread upon the sand...
and tiny toes, that kick and splash
in foaming bubble bath.

If only I'd have taken time
to think of your young life...
and all the things that you would do
if I had brought you life.
I was afraid of what they'd say
and what was I to do...?
I didn't know I'd love you
even now when you are gone.

When you grew beneath my heart
I didn't stop to think...
that you were mine and I was yours
and of my future grief.
But now I must release you,
now that you are gone...
for it's God who now will rock you
and hold you in his palm.

****

Kim Vollmer

I KNOW

Who you were to me
I can no analyze,
But not on paper.
For you've gone and
I fear I'll miss you if
I write it out.
Or you'll come
and I'll shred my love
into little bits,
and then neither one of us
will know.
Now, only I know

****

Judy Belfield

WHAT IT IS

Combo slides sound
against the face of
drumskin softness,
a powdery delicacy
as fine as a sugar cloud;
the piano creates
sublime yearnings
almost too rare to hear.
A critic next day
enjoins words in
precarious combinations;
an attempt to
teach us
how song should be constructed
(as if it were a sundeck).
Everyone knows music is, in fact,
a carefully planned
bridge
providing passage

****

Kim Vollmer

WHAT CAME FIRST

I've walked the eggshells at your feet.
It seems I've learned where not to step.
I've felt your weakness.
I need your strength.
I did not pluck my feathers
to remember my shame.
I offered you my bouquet.
You took it.
And now that I know
how to get around you,
I could walk forever circling
and never make a sound.
And never know you at all.
But I've decided to stay
and help you clean up the place.

****

Kim Vollmer

SECRETS

My flower all wild
with body that weeps, like a willow blown,
under my hand.
I tell only secrets,
don't mistake them for lies.

****

Judy Belfield

CONNECTIONS

In circles moving slowly
like the rings of a thick stew stirred
we travel--
a macrocosmic magnification
of nucleus, electrons, protons.
From as small as we know
to as large
we commit similar patterns
to a memory
connected perhaps to
a similar consciousness
existing somewhere.
Wonder, also,
may be a shared activity:
I think I am imagined I am thinking...
for a short while.
The buzzer on the clothes dryer
assaults the moment
like a telephone call
in the middle of a winter's sleep.

****

Kris Bullmer

A MATTER OF INTERPRETATION

It's amazing how certain thoughts, feelings, and ideas can cloud one's perspective about things. Long ago, I had learned to hate reading most poetry because I was taught to believe that good poetry was always "deep and meaningful." I was also taught that poetry had hidden meaning which could only be understood after much study of the work. To me, "deep and meaningful" eventually came to mean vague and confusing. Hence, I couldn't trust my feelings about a poem because I was sure that my interpretation wasn't what the author meant.

It wasn't until recently that I discovered that poetry means whatever the reader takes it to mean. This has freed me to enjoy some poetry for the first time in my life. It is nice to know that there is neither a right or a wrong interpretation when I don't understand the "great mystery" the poet is trying to express.

In a real sense, this frees me to work at understanding the poem even more, because whether I understand the poet's intent or not, I am not bound by the fear of being wrong. And a poem is just a poem, after all!

****

Maria Mellinger

SPEAK NOW

Speak
Now
For never
Hold your peace.

****

Kim Vollmer

ANSWER ME

Could you imagine
a powdered handful
tomorrow for the taking
what I could be
and become
with white clouds in my mind
to blur my thoughts
of then
to numb my ache
of now
to razor sharpen reality
for a time
might I,
just for a moment,
become who you want me to be
who I want me to be
is that the answer?

****

Bob Loewe

IN RESPONSE

Know when you read me
there is nothing artificial,
no cereals,
no fillers,
just the meat of my soul.
If you taste lies
they're not in my telling
it's due to your perception.
Before calling me a fake
open your eyes
and see the man
I truly am,
not what you've been told
or thought me to be.
If you still taste baloney
leave me on the shelf.
It's not worth the price
for either of us.

****

Kim Vollmer

I THOUGHT I KNEW

I, floored at the feel of my creator, confess that
I, stunned awake after a long sleepless dream,
admit that
I, with tattered shreds of us all around me,
know nothing.

****

Julie Futterer

TERROR

I gasp sharply.
He almost turned around.
His every motion makes me jump...
If he turns around, he will
surely see me standing
here alone.
I gasp again.
He is moving closer but has
not yet looked up.
I am frozen stiff;
I can hardly breathe.
I am suffocated by his presence.
One, two, three more steps
and he will be beside me.
I am caught in a trance;
I cannot take my eyes off of him.
What will I do?
He reaches my side and my
heart stops.
He looks into my terrified, screaming eyes
and smiles.
"Hi!" he says.
I respond with a shy smile
and a quiet "hello."
The moment is over.
As he continues past,
my muscles relax a bit
and I slowly begin breathing.
The next time I see him will be tomorrow.
I can't wait.

****

Jerald Janes

GROUCHO, HARPO, CHICO, ZEPPO, AND KARL

Fred was a bit eccentric. A bit too eccentric. Without question, he loved his children, but there was a definite absurdity to Fred's behavior.

(continued)

Groucho, Harpo, Chico, Zeppo, and Karl, continued

When the children were little, young Pablo snatched the last carrot from the fridge and made his way off to the dell to savor it. Pablo knew that Papa loved his carrots. Pablo knew that it *was* the last carrot.

Fred had a fit when he went for his carrot. None of the children owned up to it. Pablo did not own up to it.

Years passed. Fred often brought up the carrot in his fits of weird behavior. The children became adults and soon grew tired of Fred's infantile behavior. They soon all moved away.

Fred had to find a way to discover the guilty party.

He spent four years designing the damn thing, and when it was finally ready, he called his children and told them to come visit. They did.

Fred had built a crude time machine out of Radio Shack parts. he had the children assemble in the living room for the display. The entire family traveled back in time. They ended up in the wrong place, but they *did* travel back in time.

"Dad, do you realize what you have done?" asked Ollie.

"Shut up, I'm gonna find out who took that goddamn carrot!" replied Fred.

"Papa," exclaimed Stuart, "you have no idea of the importance of this machine!"

"Shut up, you! It's that fucking carrot or nothing!" snorted Fred, delirious from the bickering of a lifetime.

"Dad, you're worth millions!" reminded Hector.

"This ain't worth shit!" shouted Fred as the group traveled back and forth through time.

Finally arriving close to the intended destination, Fred finely adjusted the mechanisms until all was right. He watched out the smoky window as his children bickered and babbled amongst themselves of the new-found destiny of their father's life.

"Look, goddammit, LOOK!!!" screamed Fred as Pablo opened up the fridge door and snatched the last carrot.

"You little bastard!" he bellowed at young Pablo through the glass, then turned to the adult Pablo and kicked him square in the testicles. All the other sons helped Pablo back to his feet.

"Papa!" cried Pablo, "you really don't understand what this all means! DO YOU!!!!"

Fred stared out into the abyss as he directed the ship back to the present, not saying a word..... ....just smiling.

****

Maria Mellinger

MISUNDERSTANDING

Misunderstanding--
We clench each other tightly
In the hope it will evaporate
Like the fine sweat on your lip
After a fight.
If we lie still enough,
Close enough,
Forgetful enough,
Maybe our differences
Will melt
And a new form will
Emerge from icy anger.
But if you turn away again,
Misunderstanding's undertow
Will drag me away
And out of your grip forever.

****

Shonda Talerico

RULE #1

don't be
an individual
just be
yourself

****

Bob Loewe

DANCERS

Twisting and whirling
spinning on point
racing over ground:
I am awed by the dance
of you and your friends
Beautifully hazardous,
You have yet
to pass though a place
and leave it standing.
Dancing where you wish
twirling across the country
damaging, defying, and destroying
your favorite things.
Dance elsewhere.
Don't cross my yard.
You're not in Kansas anymore.

****

Judy Belfield

DANCE DELIRIUM

I sing a very loud song
hear the notes bounce
off the walls
crash into my ears--
makes me aware
of me,
a sound-producing thing.
I begin to dance;
a silly legs-and-arms
salad mix of
unplanned moves
that takes me from
one room to another.
The cats follow
to the bedroom,
the kitchen, the dining room;
they do not judge.
I am alive
like static,
bristling
with an energy overload.
I wonder what to do with it--
spend all?
If I had power lines,
I might store some for later.
I pass a mirror
which shows me
foolishness
without imagination.
The cats wait;
they don't understand restraint;
I love them for this.
I laugh at my face
laughing back at me
then dance on
through the rooms again.

****

Nels Nelson

CAN'T FOLLOW

Where did you go, brother,
When you were thirteen and I, ten,
I an oh yet too young but in a few years
Ten?
Did you do secret things, did you sneak a smoke?
Today, you, a fifty year old twenty-four,
Asking where I go at night, but no,
You can't come.
You wouldn't understand not being forgiven for passing
A door.
No, you mayn't come with me.
No remote control here, no air-conditioning. And
you not an oh yet too young.

****

Maria Mellinger

CARNIVAL

Talk. Filling up with it. Bubbling over with it like a full glass of carbonation sensation. Exploding with talk. But no one to listen.

Call. Call the friends. Call the empty night. Call the cops, I don't care. It's a good mood and it needs to be lived while it's strong. Tomorrow it will disappear.

The car. Drive. To one house or another, it doesn't really matter. As long as the house has ears.

No. Bodies are home, but nothing with which to listen. Nothing that can hear.

Escape. Now.

Don't talk.

Bury the words in a deep plot, leave not tombstone behind. An unmarked grave of great importance.

Don't talk.

The circus leaves town. Takes little Hope with it. A carnival of silence moves in.

****

J. Ardith Cox

ABSENTEES

Absence of evil is not always good.
Absence of "cannot" is not always "could".

Absence of darkness is not always light.
Absence of error is not always right.

Absence of courage is not always fear.
Absence of sorrow is not always cheer.

Absence of sunshine is not always rain.
Absence of pleasure is not always pain.

Absence of false words is not always truth.
Absence of old age is not always youth.

Absence of fire is not always ice.
Absence of sugar is not always spice.

Absence of loving is always the same.
Absence where no one is ever to blame.

****

J. Ardith Cox

TRUCE

A friendship gained, a friendship lost,
One thing's for sure, a friendship costs.

A troubled scene of days gone by,
A haze of gray soon fills the sky.

A world, dim, without a care,
A future, dark, one of despair.

A sword of pride, and one of hate,
Soon scar my mind, and scar my fate.

The shadows cast from either side,
Let no hearts run, let no hearts hide.

Then battles, vicious, full of rage,
Soon turn a final, love-torn page.

And 'neath the rubble, one heart lies,
Then squirms in pain and finally dies.

The smoke soon clears and then you see,
A flag of white, one raised by me.

****

Jerald Janes

DREAM #3

I can make myself float if I concentrate hard enough.

I am all alone in the front yard. It is autumn, and the leaves are falling. I refuse to give in.

I stand out in the center of the yard and gain composure. I stabilize my breathing...I concentrate on the center of my mass. I begin.

I take a breath, in as deeply as I can.. .I exhale...I continue the process until it has developed a deep and slow rhythm...I have established the correct rhythm.

I concentrate no longer on my breathing,

but on the eye of my body's hurricane. My will pushes it skywards.

I breathe deeper now, more deeply than I physically can. I get lighter...My mind floats in ignorance of the laws of nature.

I see the angle between my foot and shin begin to open up. There soon is no angle, for my feet are dangling, free of my body's weight.

My spirit's cogwheel latches onto a track, and I feel it pulling me upward.

****

Kim Vollmer

TELEPHONE

I do some of my best thinking
to the silence you supply;
when we are miles apart
and connected only by the wires.

****

Maria Mellinger

SLEEPAWAY

Sleepaway
Dreamaway
The words
That won't go away
But never
Never
Throw away

****

Kim Vollmer

DEAD

You are air.
I am fire.
We are good together.
We were good together,
I kept you warm and
you fanned my flames to life.
I tried to burn you, to put my mark upon you--
And now you've left me
for dead.

****

Jacque Klika

DEATH

Vases of flowers
lie upon a fresh grave site.
...Tears on lace pillows.

A lonely street light
illumines a darkened room.
Photo albums lay open.

A teacup shatters
as morning alarm sounds.
Another day begins.

****

Judy Belfield

DYING

Curling smoke from cigars
settled yellow on the walls
discolored the window
distorted his only view of the outside.
Slowly
the dayafterday layer-upon-layer
filmed over his screen;
the actors and scenery
dulled daily--
all took on a jaundiced hue,
the edges browned
in a splattered pattern,
closed in
across the glass...
one day for him
the world ended.

****

J. Ardith Cox

"DON'T LET GO"

i know you want to set love free;
i see it in your eyes.
i know inside you care for me;
and cry when my heart cries.

i feel it every time you're near;
i know that you have tried.
i feel a love behind your fear;
the love you couldn't hide.

i see the heart that someone broke;
i feel the pain you show.
i saw you cry the day you spoke
the three words, "Don't let go."

i ask you if, a chance, you'll take;
your answer lies unknown.
i ask you if a heart will break;
you answer me, "Your own."

i hear the words you say to me;
those words are true, i know.
i heard you whisper, "Set me free,"
but now i won't let go.

****

Sherry Gunderman

THE EMPTY CHAIR

I saw the empty chair.
And thought of the empty space
You had given us
When you exited our lives
With the blissful glee that you had exhibited.
We hated you
For leaving us
Because we loved you
When you were one of us.

And now you are a different person.
And although we try
To fill the chair,
It is hopeless.
And the chair remains
empty.

****

Dawn Simmons

PART II

Yes, I too saw the empty chair.
I felt resentment that it was once occupied
and I felt relief of its present vacancy.
In your hands you held her feelings, emotions, and heart.
Like a lump of clay, you manipulated them to no end.
It appeared as one big game to you--
or did you realize the pain you cased
and the level of which you controlled?
Your ego kept you flying high
when alcohol wouldn't.
And to take those feelings seriously?
For you it was a joke and you couldn't.
And sometimes I see you sit in the empty chair
when I truly believe you shouldn't.
Yes, I too saw the empty chair.
Do you see your name written on it,
because I don't.

****

Nels Nelson

DAMN

Eye beame an ear,
And time, the off-beat
And you, the rich timbrel
Ear became a body,
And time, a kiss from cracked lips,
And sleep, a lover's sex.
The body reverted to an eye,
And a realization of how lonely
I am.

****

Dawn Simmons

ABYSMALITY

Where are you now?
Did your soul die along with your
heart?
The wings that bring forth
showers of greatness
have vanished.
A vase falls upon my imagination
and I am reminded of
the slushy existence of it all.
Let it all out.
Winds blow new change towards
our sheltering egos.
Rings of gratitude encircle us and
we scream to be set free from
the cage of morality.

****

Nels Nelson

I'M SORRY

That last cigarette,
Sticking to my lips,
The smoke hanging, pulling,
Blacking my lungs,
Making my eyes bleed,
Leaving me ragged
As I scream at it,
"You fuck!"
Murdering it,
A mercy kill,
Smearing its glowing guts
On a harsh, foreign sidewalk,
It was my best friend.

****

Nels Nelson

BIRTHDAY PARTY AT JERRY'S

Today a celebration
King for a day, the old cliche
Drink and dance, laugh, friends by chance
A bad wine that clings brown to my tongue
We all singing different songs
Neighbors, voyeurs, looking at us queer
Some basketball in the cold
Sweet, low-down, dirty blues
Through the car stereo
Beer and gin, and that bad wine
Some good wine, too, and candles
Cigarettes, wishes and handshakes
Lots of teeth, we're still all so young.

****

Rich Goberville

ETERNITY

I called you on the phone today
Your Dad answered and politely told me you were
out
I hung up, disappointed
Wasn't that the day we were supposed to see a
movie
But you were out
Out leading a new life
Apart from me
I could feel you slipping away
Like grains of sand flowing through my fingers
The tighter I clenched my fist the faster it sifted out
I tried to hold on to you so dearly
But you managed to escape my grasp
I opened my hand to see an emptiness
The same emptiness I knew before you
But then I looked more closely in my palm
To find one grain of sand left behind
But this wasn't just any grain of sand
This one was filled with the dreams
I shared with you
It was filled with the tears
And laughter we shared
And then I realized

That you weren't really gone
You left behind the most precious thing
You left behind your memories.

****

Maria Mellinger

PRINCESS OF SORROW

Princess of sorrow
Iced into my life
Like the cold fringes
At a windowsill.
Knight of night
True god of true god
Rescue me
With secret warmth.

****

Maria Mellinger

SO MANY FAMILIAR FACES

So many familiar faces--
The color of the hair,
The line of the cheekbone,
A view from a few paces behind;
But not a single feature
Is yours.

****

Kim Vollmer

HAIR OF THE DOG

Four months, I was
Drunk with your love.
Intoxicated fully
Free--
In a dizzy spin,
This morning
I puked.

****

Nels Nelson

SURBURBAN SHAMAN

On the crystal night,
"Don't breathe, the air will shatter
and slice our lives,"
Beside the ancient fire,
There were stories, liquor,
Modern rituals,
And it was these that mude us,
The backyard Indians.

****

Clariece Henne

PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMORIES

The photograph is black and white, taken before colored film was available. The little girl in the photograph appears to be about five years old. She is standing under a tree and the play of sunshine and shadow make the picture come alive. The girl is wearing "Mary Janes" and white anklets on her feet. She is wearing a light-colored cotton dress with a white collar. The picture was taken before the advent of polyester. her hair is parted on the side and pulled over neatly in a barrette. Even though the photograph is black and white, it is obvious her hair is the color of the sunshine on that day. The cay smile on her face and the look of trust in her eyes give hint to the bond between girl and photographer. In her hand she is holding a long white envelope, offering a look to the photographer. Written across the right hand corner of the picture are the words, "Oh goodie! A letter from Daddy."

On the same page in the photo album, in another picture, stand a man and woman. They are under the same tree as the little girl. The same sunlight and shadows play across the background. The woman is wearing a print dress that falls softly from her shapely form. The style of the dress gives a clue to the year the picture was taken--sometime in the 1940s. She has a tense smile and a look of sadness in her eyes. The man holding her tightly to his side is incredibly handsome in his army uniform. There is now writing on the bottom of this photo--what can be said of the pain of parting in only a few words?

There is no picture in the album of a little girl clinging to her father; the father unable to set her off his lap. A taxi in the street, in front of the house. A loving grandfather gently lifts the girl from her father's arms and the separation is made.

There is no picture in the album of a little girl sitting on the floor in front of an old-fashioned radio. The room is dark save for a pinpoint of light on the radio dial. A man's voice comes from the radio ominously droning a list of names. The little girl is tense with fear that she will hear the name of her father. There are others in the room, but to the little girl at that moment there is nothing but the pinpoint of light and the hypnotic list of names.

There are no pictures of the shapely woman lying in bed with her pillow clutched to her face so as to muffle the sobs that are her only company, night after lonely night.

There are other pictures in the album--four pictures in a row of a soldier with a helmet and a backpack and in his hand is a very long rifle, on the end of the rifle is a bayonet. After a closer look, it becomes apparent that there is a different man in each one of the photos. They all share the same look of determined fear. Not many smiles on these faces.

There is one photo of the handsome father standing before a skinny tree. Tied to the skinny tree is a helmet, hanging upside down. The man is bare to the waist and his face is covered with shaving cream. He is holding a razor in his hand, and it becomes obvious the helmet is filled with water to the man can shave.

These photos tell us there were friendships made and men groomed themselves, even though they carried long rifles with bayonets stuck on the ends.

There are no pictures in this album of the family reunited. Those photos are saved for another album, an album where the pictures depict the father pushing the little girl (somehow not as little as before) on a swing. The shadow of the photographer falls across the scene, faintly reminiscent of the shapely figure in the other pictures.

Perhaps, by not mixing the photographs of these two separates times, this family silently displayed their resolve to put the lonely, fearful war years behind them. Not to be forgotten because these years were a part of their lives but just set aside so a new life could be nourished for this tiny family.

****

Kim Vollmer

TRAITOR CONSCIENCE

I can surround myself with actions
so my insides won't stir.
But alone, at bedtime, still awake
with all the house tighter than quiet;
I can hear my own thoughts
in a mocking voice.
A voice that claims not to know me
or understand my intentions.
Panic beats my heart.
I am still, stifled, awake,
I am wide awake
and divided into two;
the one who did it,
and the one who pays the price.

****

Maria Mellinger

A STILL SMALL VOICE

A still, small voice,
The hermit's repose,
The religion of
Hymn
And him.

****

Shonda Talerico

INSIDE

Open your eyes
        I am here
My soul is barren
        Because I have given all
All to you
        Feelings...
Trampled underfoot
        I speak those words
That give me joy
        That bring you pain
"I love you."

****

Kim Vollmer

ON THE INSIDE

My belly is starved of you
and yet I have no taste.
Someday a woman will come
to free the caged and clawless bird
inside your eyes.
Inside the out,
you will become together
that of which you dance, alone.
It seems I am yet a girl.

****

Dawn Simmons

MELANCHOLY

The sun shines strongly
on this Thursday morning.
During the ride there
I force myself to think of different things.
I mostly wonder
what you will look like,
because people who have seen these things before
tell me they won't make you look like "you."

I wonder what you will be wearing
(sweats and a T?)
and how your hair will be combed
(your hair--combed?)
My thoughts are eaten up by reality.
It is a closed casket...

...My alarm goes off
and I awake to the hazy sun
peeking through the blinds.
The dried tears on my face
(I must have cried in my sleep)
become washed away by new ones
(Mom says I called out your name
several times during the night).

A car pulls into the drive.
I tuck my black shirt
into my black skirt--
bought to wear on this day especially for you--
and somehow fit an extra package of tissues
into my purse.
My ride is here
and I can't miss this chance to say
Goodbye.

****

Kim Vollmer

MEND THE BREAK

Upon your leaving, my arms ache
for body between them/
They press the air
with anger.
And I am guilty
for wanting,
of needing you to brave the world,
and never do I know
that the strength of your hold
will endure
without a physical bond.
So always I am holding.
I pull you harder, closer,
tighter to me;
knowing well all the while
that you are breaking away.
Thinking, ironically, that
pulling you to me
will mend the break.

****

Nels Nelson

MODERN SLAUGHTER

Four dead earwigs lie
In a porcelain battlefield.
Drown, rubbing alcohol warfare,
Illegal in most kingdoms,
Not mine, though.
They were spies, I was threatened
As I sat majestically upon my throne.
They died like cowards, twisting the
Dance of Demise.
I laugh at them.
I am a superpower.

****

Walter Coffey

MRS. EMMA HOLLAND'S NUCLEAR POPSICLE

When I was only a small and homicidal child, I can remember a kind and elderly woman who lived alone on my block. Neither I nor any of the other eight children on the block knew very much about her, but we were completely enthralled with her beautiful home, her kind smile, her incredible generosity, and her peculiar private life.

Several times during our young, pathetic little lives, we children had conspired to ambush Mrs. Holland and get to the bottom of her odd behavior. The nine of us had planned to surround her all at once and bombard her with the kinds of questions only children of our particular age group had the nerve and imagination to ask.

But also, plan after plan quickly failed. We even attempted a more direct approach by hurling stones with notes attached to them through her upper stained-glass windows. For some reason, Mrs. Holland never answered them, and this aroused suspicions even more.

Every day after school, we children would congregate at the neighborhood playground, ironically directly across the street from Mrs. Holland's lovely home. And every day without fail, Mrs. Holland would sit on her front porch, calmly knitting in her rocking chair while keeping a watchful but gentle eye on us. It was as if she were assuring us that we wouldn't erupt into fistcuffs without her supervision.

She was always there, and she would never fail to assume her usual posture--sitting back rocking forward and reverse on her wooden rocking chair, wearing those wire-rimmed glasses with the chain attached and securely wrapped around her neck. She wore a different dress each day, but they all had a pastel color of some sort in common.

We were never sensitive enough to appreciate her hospitality, but she never seemed to care. Whenever thirst set in on the playground and we were too lazy to walk home to get a drink, Mrs. Holland would always surprise us with an ice-cold pitcher of lemonade, or any other kind of -ade suitable for drinking. And of course, we would eagerly drink like suckling pigs and then leave without even muttering a single English syllable. But for some peculiar reason, she didn't care.

We were all aware of the fact that Mrs. Holland was indeed married at one time, but one day he suddenly vanished and we never caught a glimpse of him again. His sudden departure did not seem to phase Mrs. Holland in the least; she was as kind and as decent to us innocent little children as she ever was.

Although we were all very fond of Mrs. Holland, we were never too friendly within her presence--mainly because of her unknown (and, therefore) mysterious personal life. She refused to open up to us less-than-understand kids, and we resented her constant secretiveness. Until one day...

As my best friend and I were wandering home from yet another trying day at elementary school, we happened to pass by Mrs. Holland's

(continued)

home. and as usual, she was seated on her front porch calmly knitting as she blurted out a weak "hello" and we waved in her general direction. But suddenly, an undetectable urge overcame us to stop at her house, and we did just that.

"What are you knitting?" my friend asked her as we approached her porch steps.

"A shuttle rocket," she replied without looking up.

"Wow!" I exclaimed. "Can we watch?"

She nodded her head affirmatively and continued her work while we made our way up the porch stairs.

"Are you thirsty?" she asked while we stood over her. Without waiting for an answer, she dropped her work on the porch, got out of her chair and beckoned to us from the front door. As eager as little children can be, we followed her into her home for the first time in our lives.

We quickly bolted through the door, fearful of being locked out if we hesitated to enter. Once inside, it took us a while to adjust our eyes to the darkness of the room. And by the time our eyes were usable again, Mrs. Holland led us into a brilliantly lit room; the brightness seemed nearly solar in magnitude. We were politely seated at a small table in the corner of the room, and in front of us were two equally-poured glasses of lemonade.

When our eyes were back to normal once more, we could see that we were in the kitchen, and it was extremely clean. The walls were painted a fluorescent orange and their reflection from the ceiling light was practically blinding.

I remember the lemonade was exceptionally good that day; Mrs. Holland always made the mistake of adding plenty of sugar to our servings. She looked after the best interests of the children, unlike any other stingy grown-up in our crummy neighborhood. And we liked that a great deal.

She quickly refilled our glasses after finishing our first dose, and as we made hogs of ourselves she stood over us, watching and smiling kindheartedly.

As I investigated the kitchen, I noticed a large metal object standing in the center of her cabinet, located across the room from where we were seated. The object was to the right of her sink and to the left of her enormous refrigerator. It resembled a large silver popsicle because protruding from the top was a long, thin wooden handle. Neither I nor my friend could possibly imagine what it was, so we stared at it for over five minutes trying to see what it could be. Finally, the tension in the room reached its peak and curiosity overcame us once more.

"What is that metal thing?" my friend asked Mrs. Holland, pointing directly at it. Without even looking, Mrs. Holland knew exactly what he was talking about.

"That," she began simply enough, "is a nuclear celluloid combination device used solely for the purpose of engineering and maintaining my robotic mobility."

"Oh," I retaliated intelligently enough, "but can it make ice cream?"

Bold as we were, my friend and I approached the object, fondling it and looking at it with amazement and wonder. Mrs. Holland took a step towards us, but did not make any attempt to halt our investigation.

"I wouldn't touch that if I were you," she spoke rather meekly. "You might start another war or something."

While continuing to fondle the contraption, I felt three small buttons lined in a vertical row on the backside. "Hey, what are these?" I said demandingly as I considered pressing one.

"Don't push that one," she warned, "that's my--"

I touched the top button and we suddenly felt the room temperature rise at least fifteen degrees. In another instant, the contraption split itself down the center and thick white smoke poured out from it. As we waved the stuff out of our faces, we heard a distant voice similar to Mrs. Holland's, mutter, "--self-destruct button."

Less than fifteen seconds after, we raced out into the street. Mrs. Holland's beautiful home was completely engulfed by a tremendous white smoke cloud.

My friend and I never looked away throughout the entire ordeal as we stood across the street and watched the massive cloud devour the house. When the smoke finally cleared, there was absolutely no trace of the house, the porch, or god ol' Mrs. Holland to be found anywhere.

To this day, ten years later, my best friend and I are yet to conceive of a valid explanation as to whatever became of the lovely home; that metal popsicle, or even Mrs. Holland. Can you?

****

Dawn Simmons

MIKE'S REGRET

Having her as a Friend
overruled the importance of having her as More.
(Everyone knows that Friends outlast More).
So after months of being Both
(which is twice as better than any)
he called off the More.
He traded in Both for the Friend that would last longer.
Now he has something new.
Nothing.

****

Dawn Simmons

WEB SAYS

Heartache-(n.) Emotional anguish; sorrow
Sorrow-(n.) 1. Mental suffering because of loss or injury. 2. Something that causes grief.
Grief-(n.) 1. A cause of sorrow. 2. Deep sadness.
Sadness-(n.) Unhappy, deplorable; result of heartache.
Heartache-(n.)...

****

Shonda Talerico

GRAMMA

She taught me how to think, and how to dream.

When I was a young girl, I would visit her farmhouse with the rolling acres of green, and she would keep me awake deep into the night with her fascinating stories. She had such a gift for storytelling. I was bolted to the chair, with my tired eyes popped open as I dove into the past with her. Some of my favorite stories sketched her life in the orphanage as a young girl. Through her eyes, I envisioned her running to the powder room when the nuns clicked off the lights, smearing soap on her dark hair to creates stunning yet fashionable spit curls.

Other priceless stories were about my mother (that my mother didn't want me to find out about). Like the time she came home filled to her eyeballs with hard liquor and stumbled around until my Gramma dished out a couple of lumps on Ma's intoxicated head.

Gramma also offered vital advice concerning the adventures of womanhood, such as how to shuffle two dates in one night and still make it to work at Brach's Chocolate the next day, and how to deal with flashers while riding the train in Chicago.

"Goldie" wasn't like most grandmothers who sat in rockers with heavy sweaters draped over their shoulders while they knitted. Gramma was a swinger with enough energy for two people.

She and her grandchildren spent many winters tumbling down the icy hill in front of her house on garbage can lids. She taught us how to play jacks. She roller skated with her arm in a cast (from falling down at the skating rink) and beat me in roller races every time at the age of 60. She introduced me to rock candy (which was more precious than any Snickers bars because it was so ancient) and the art of enjoying it. She seated me next to her on the organ bench, and we sang old songs--it didn't matter if I didn't know the tunes to such greats as "Over There"--her thunderous Phantom of the Opera style usually drowned my squeaky, off-key voice out anyways. We then played Uno all night long while we smacked on her Croation bakery treats.

Gramma's keen intelligence aided me in conquering countless spelling bees as a result of her constant quizzing. I could spell every word correctly, but she would disqualify it if I didn't pronounce the word before and after my spelling, as they did long ago when she was in school. But no matter how much I hated it, it disciplined me.

She had a penchant for fancy things, and my sister and I would wander into her glorious bedroom with reverence reserved for royalty. We were awed by her sparkling jewelry, gorgeous furs and flashy clothes, especially her gold and silver shoes, which could have belonged to Cinderella.

She was a queen in my eyes, and I was her "Princess Shondy." Someday, I dreamed, I would grow up and be just like her.

I was thinking these cluttered thoughts as I paid my last respects. Unwillingly, I edged over to the casket. My feet didn't want to budge, and I was too afraid to look. Through my tears I saw her white, gnarled hands that clasped around her glittering rosary. I touched her raised veins on her hands, surprised to find them cold, lifeless and unyielding. I expected a hug, a bright red lipstick kiss, and a booming laugh. Where was the smell of Big Red chewing gum and Charlie cologne?

This wasn't her, it was a shell of the woman that was Gramma. I stumbled to my seat. Voices swam past me in the ocean of blur. "I'm sorry" and "My sincere condolences" flew about as misguided boomerangs. Through the fog I beheld

(continued)

Gramma, continued

Grampa, the lights reflecting off his smooth head. He, naturally, fell into his duty of receiving our relatives and friends, all of whom we had dined and celebrated with a few months earlier at my grandparents 50th wedding anniversary.

I had wanted to grow up to be just like her. I wasn't ready to say goodbye. There was just so much more that I could learn from her.

I stared out the window at our trees. My parents, sister, and I had planted pine trees and named them after ourselves, so that we could leave apart of ourselves in Indiana. As I gazed at my tree, which was blossoming as I was into a young woman, I realized that I shouldn't shed tears and feel these pangs of loneliness and emptiness. She had live 74 years, a full life. I had been lucky to know and love her for 18 years. Just because she was gone from this earth didn't mean that she was gone from my heart and my mind.

I turned away from the window and rested my gaze on my younger sister. Jes, who usually doesn't show any hint of emotion, was silently weeping. Neither one of us had experienced death before. I went over to her and stroked her shoulder. I wanted to tell her, Jes, maybe it was enough just to know and love her. That she could always carry Gramma in her heart, where she would always be there for us.

But I couldn't tell her those words because it was difficult to speak. I just walked away and we dealt with it in our own ways.

****

Norma Dodge

AMBIDEXTROUS

We quarreled
I was right
He left.
It's no fun to be
Right and left.

****

Clariece Henne

SUMMER RAIN

Hidden raindrops magnify the colors
The green of the grass is fluorescent
The white of the goose is opalescent
Giving a surrealistic quality to this day.

****

Joseph Nahas

THE GRINDLE

One kind of man there is
who dreams and does;
Another sits by and laughs
if he fails--
The Voyager seeks perfection
doomed to disappointment,
but the Mundane Mocker
thrives in mediocrity
afraid to change the
normality of his ways
rolling in the squalid sector
of indecision
afraid of winning
destined to lose
The great man attempts
and is glorious at his peak,
and might in his fall

****

Julie Futterer

ZAMBUKA

Zambuka,
my magic elixir-
I swoon with your passion!
You make me feel and think and live.
When under your spell,
I become the romantic
or the rebel
or the intelligent one.
Your potent remedy heals my broken heart.
I have no fears.
I can conquer the world if I so choose.
With you, I am a free spirit!

Zambuka,
my poisonous potion-
You have defeated me!
You force me to endure pain and suffering.
When you leave me,
I am the average
the ordinary
the vulnerable one.
Your deadly venom infects my tender heart.
I fear.
I perish under the world's mighty strength.
With you, I am only a prisoner!

****

Anna Danbury

WHY DIDN'T I TAKE THE STAIRS!

The metal grey doors seal together, stale air
is the menu until the twentieth floor.
An upbeat song pours out from the headphones,
only you can hear the melody.
The rhythm seems to ease tension, and your
hips sway into a figure eight motion.
At first a slight movement, but slowly turns
into an erotic dance.
You instinctively close your eyelids, and the
dance gets more complex.
You twirl, your shoulders sway, left-right
left, all on a five foot stage.
Indoor carpet on the floor, muffles your steps
music's too loud to hear anyway.
Your heart beats harder and synchronized
to your sways and moves.
It feels so good to lose the stiffness,
your body starts to move with tribal abandon.
You twirl once more as the song's beat
gets faster and more intense.
Ummmph. You open your eyes to see what
you have run into.
He is wearing tweed, polyester and the
broadest smile in history.
Your face rushes hot, the color of a ripe
Washington cherry.
When did he get on the elevator? Oh
God why didn't I take the stairs!

****

Jacque Klika

STREET CORNERS

Lighted street corner.
Illumined snow flakes obscure
lonely street people.

Forgotten children...
dirty, rain drenched, hungry...
beg on street corners.

Smiling moon children
sell roses on street corners.
Passers-by turn away

****

Judy Belfield

DESIGNS

Like Jackson Pollack tracks
across a cream-colored canvas
my silent invitation
seems haphazardly splattered--
a short stipple here
and a sudden sharp turn,
barbed-wire tangles of line
holding together a shape
not quite defined.
There is no accident;
the question was planned
and examined
long before asking,
its unspoken words dissected
into the tiniest pieces.
I put it to you again
knowing the answer
will equal the sound
of the request.
It doesn't matter;
I know you love me.

****

J. Ardith Cox

YOUR EYES

When silence speaks much louder than
The words you sometimes say,
Your eyes keep saying, "I love you,"
In your own special way.

When laughter swells inside your soul
But finds no open door,
A smile appears inside your eyes
And makes your face smile more.

When sadness hides the way you feel,
And teardrops fill your eyes,
The love you have for me just grows,
As selfish loving dies.

When I don't love the way I should,
By holding back my heart;
Your eyes look into mine and say,
"I'm giving all, not part."

****

Anna Danbury

THE EYES HAVE IT

Realize a dream.
Rationalize a failure.
Criticize a winner.
Sympathize with a loser.
Metamorphosize the rules.

****

Judy Belfield

INTRIGUE

I am bewildered by the importance
of secret knowledge
he reads in my eyes
but will not speak.
We face each other
knowing a thing perfectly profound
but forbidden expression.
I know what bullfrogs feel
in their throats;
I know intensely mute sadness
and maniacal soundless joy;
I know the meaning of exquisite.
He knows I know these things;
We know them together
in a transcendent thought
which would destroy us
in a swift sudden moment
with the utterance of a word.
But...

****

Norma Dodge

FORBIDDEN FRUIT

The plump, red apple hanging so temptingly from the bough was almost more than Stella could bear. She and her sisters had been warned away from the apple tree over and over. Dire threats of awful retribution had been made by their father, if one of them should dare to pick that apple.

Gardening was her father's favorite pastime, and the apple tree was the pride of his life. It stood above the shrubs and flower beds like a queen reigning over her subjects.

Stella and her sisters, Tracy and Edna, were happiest when they playing in their yard, but they were careful not to damage any of their father's growing things. They knew that he saved for a long time so that he could buy a new plant or shrub for his garden. Money was not plentiful in their household.

The carefully nurtured apple tree had been a major purchase two years before, and it had finally rewarded its proud owner's loving care by bearing one apple. If the tree's branches had been drooping to the ground under the weight of a bumper crop of apples, father could not have been more proud.

As carefully tended as a much-loved and indulged only child, the apple grew more plump and red with every day that passed.

On a sunny Saturday morning, Stella's father announced that today would be the day to reap the harvest of his endeavors. Such an occasion as this required the presence of the whole family.

"Stella, Tracy, Edna! Where are you?" he called.

"Come, Mother, you can leave the cleaning till later! Stella, why are you lagging behind?" Father was impatient.

Hastening everyone along, father led the little group outside, and together they approached the star of the ceremony.

But what was this? Why did that rosy globe, which had shone so rosily only the day before, appear to be misshapen and discolored? Almost trembling, father lifted the apple gently from the branch and examined it. His rage knew no bounds when he discovered the large puckered hole gaping in its side.

His eyes swept over his family, coming to rest on Stella, who tried vainly to hide behind her mother's skirt.

"Stella," he roared, "do you know anything about this?"

"Yes, Papa," she sobbed. Through frightened tears and sobs, the culprit confessed to her crime. While knowing that she dared not pick it, the temptation was to great, and, standing on a chair, she had taken a great bite out of the apple.

Retribution in the form of a severe spanking was swiftly administered.

****

Kris Bullmer

I DO NOT SLEEP ALONE AT NIGHT

I do not sleep alone at night
though I try
Your need for me comes
searching in the dark
To curl up against me tight
So small and yet so strong
is that need
That even if I roll away,
it finds me
Perhaps I have some need of
you, too

****

Norma Dodge

ENCOUNTER

Stella hurried toward home, the loosely wrapped package of meat clasped tightly in her arms. Mother would be angry if she were not home soon. Father, who worked so long and hard in the coal mines every day, wanted his supper promptly on the table every night. Tired and dirty when he arrived home, he wanted a bath and a hearty meal more than anything at the end of the day.

Behind Stella, a tall, handsome young man strode swiftly along the darkening street. As he passed her with barely a glance, a sudden clamor of young voices rent the air.

"There's Mr. McCallem! Hi, Mr. McCallem!" And a half dozen or so little boys, of assorted ages and sizes, appeared as if from nowhere.

"Give us some money, Mr. McCallem, give us a nickel!" they shouted as they swarmed around him with grubby hands outstretched.

Stella was shocked at such a blatant display of bad manners, even while she secretly felt a little envy of children who were allowed to play in the street even as dusk approached.

She slowed her steps to watch the fun, as the young man handed out small change and good-natured badinage indiscriminately. The young man looked at her and reached into his pocket for more change. Embarrassed at having thought one of those conscienceless young beggars, Stella whirled around to run home. To her horror, the package of meat came undone, and a string of anemic-looking sausages dangled from her hands.

The young man, amused at first, saw her stricken look. Before the little boys could notice and jeer at her predicament, he herded them along with, "Get on home now, your folks will be looking for you."

As they scattered, whooping and shouting as only small boys can, he helped Stella rewrap the sausages and watched her go on her way.

Neither Stella nor the nameless young man dreamed that another meeting was in store for them in the future--a meeting that would lead to courtship and marriage.

****

Jerald Janes

THE REAL, GENUINE IMITATION.

Hank never ventured past his property's limit. The sidewalk was too much. The street was out of question. To consider going out of town was absurd.

Hank was 34 years old. Hank had no job. Hank never had a job. Hank owned a home. Hank had a dead, distant relative. Hank had no other family. Hank had no acquaintances. Hank won the Lotto one year. Hank watched cable television a lot.

Hank sent out for everything. He used Tropical Breeze underarm. "So this is what a tropical breeze smells like," thought Hank. It probably did. Hank ate food too. He really liked banana popsicles and barbecue flavored potato chips. "So that's what a banana tastes like. So that's what barbecued food tastes like," thought Hank. It probably did too.

One day Hank sat down in front of his really big television, turned on the Weather channel, made love to his love doll, and drank Pineapple punch. After climaxing, Hank finished his drink and lay spent on the carpet. The well-groomed token female on the Weather channel spoke very furiously about the climate in Hawaii.

"Go to Hawaii! It's warm there. The food is good. The tropical wind smells simply marvelous. Pineapples fall from the tree into your hands. You can meet your soulmate in Hawaii very easily."

"Boy!" exclaimed Hank. "I'm going to Hawaii!" He turned to the Travel channel. He waited fourteen hours in front of the TV until they got around

(continued)

The Real, Genuine Imitation, continued

to Hawaii. He called the toll-free number, got his tick ets, awaited the day, called a cab, and bravely left home for the promise of Hawaii and its splendors.

The flight was wonderful. He ate a beef-like soy burger and talked to his neighbor about cable reception. The plane landed, and Hank anxiously made his way to the door. There was a great reception for all the travelers by a group of compensated, genetically diluted, Hawaiians, in native dress. Hank felt very important.

"These people are so happy to see me!" exclaimed Hank to his neighbor. The neighbor smirked at Hank. This made Hank very confused.

At the hotel room, Hank walked out onto the balcony and took in a deep breath just like people do on TV. "This doesn't smell at all like a tropical breeze," thought the bewildered Hank.

He ventured down to the beach and was struck on the head by an aberrant boomerang. Expecting it to be a promised pineapple, he looked skyward. He found no tree. He found no trees on the beach, just lots of people taking photographs of each other.

Later that evening, he attended a large dinner given fro his group. He ate steak, barbecued pork, and banana pudding. After uncontrolled vomiting, he came to the realization that nothing on this island was real. A young native girl approached the hunched Hank.

"Are you okay?" she asked him.

"No!" cried Hank. "Everything here is fake. Nothing is real!"

"I'm real," she said, and led Hank back to her condo.

"Have you ever made love to a woman?" she asked. After a moment's thought, Hank responded.

"Sure I have!" The two kissed. The breath from her nose bothered Hank's concentration. He mouthed her chest and disliked the salty taste of her flesh. Within minutes, the two began to have intercourse.

Hank was sickened with the smell of her body. He was set back by her aggressive movements. her moaning prompted him to lose all interest. It was all too brutal, too animal, too confusing, too fake. He withdrew from the girl and bolted for the shower.

"What did I do?" she asked him.

"You're too much like an animal! I'm sorry, but I like clean living," replied Hank through the shower door.

She ran from the hotel room in tears. Hank toweled off, dressed, grabbed his luggage, and caught the next flight back to the mainland.

Back at home, Hank vaulted onto the couch, turned on the Lifetime Network, and feasted on Ranch-flvored Doritos and cherry Coke.

It felt good to be home.

****

Rich Goberville

PARATISITIC

You come to me
Like a mosquito in the night
Trying to suck my life
Into your own veins

Your claw-like fingers
Clamp onto my shoulders
So that everywhere I go
You are carried along

Your mind overflows
With past and present problems
Demoning them all off on me
Forcing me to solve them

You step behind me
Fire breath on my back
"Love me" you say
As I am enveloped by your coldness

But I will not
Hold you up any longer
You will not continue to feast
On my weary body and soul

You are about to fall
Into you self-made grave
Because I only have enough strength
For me

****

Anna Danbury

LITTLE GOLD BOX

My mother gave me a treasure the other day. Diamonds you may wonder? No, much more valuable. She handed me a small 14k gold box, only three inches square. When opened, it holds a few pairs of earrings, and perhaps a necklace. All in the softness of deep red velvet, still like new. She cranked the small tab underneath, to start the music box's song. "Somewhere My Love" started to play in those high-pitched pings. Sounding just as dainty now as when I was seven. I can see my mother sitting on the edge of her bed, clearly in my mind. She's holding that box as I sit at her feet listening in awe. And then she would sing. Oh her voice was so deep, so motherly. She could have been a professional singer, but had me instead. Her voice would vibrato better than Julie Andrews could dream of. And she would always get that distant sadness in her hazel eyes. I can never forget that look, or how beautiful she was as she sang. I understand so much more about her now than when I was seven. So this gold box means much much more to me than a diamond. This box holds my mother, her sweetness, caring and tears. And I will always hear her voice whenever I open it, touching the velvet. When I need a little comfort, or a small amount of her wisdom, I'll open that box and listen, wide-eyed and full of wonder.

****

Rich Goberville

MOTHER

"Come on Becky, hurry up." The mother's skinny fingers clutch her daughter's arm as she pulls her along. "I don't have all day. I have a lot of things to do."

"Ow! Mommy, you're hurting my arm!"

"Well, then, walk faster!" the mother shouts as the grocery store's automatic doors close behind them.

"What do you think I should make for dinner tonight?" she asks her daughter.

"How 'bout some sgetti?"

"It's called spaghetti, and no, the sauce is too expensive. I only have thirty dollars to go grocery shopping this week. How about some macaroni? It's almost the same thing."

"Oh, macaroni is good too, Mommy. Thanks."

"Don't say 'thanks,' say 'thank you,'" her mother corrects.

"Thank you, Mommy," her daughter repeats.

The mother quickly walks down the aisles, pushing her cart with one hand and dragging her child with the other. With each step, her polyester pants make an annoying, scratchy sound. She stops to pick up the macaroni and drops it in her cart along with the other groceries.

"Okay, let's go," she says, tugging on her daughter. She walks to the checkout counter and unloads her groceries.

"Can I have this candy bar, please?" her daughter politely asks.

"No. I said I don't have much money, Becky."

"Please?" she asks again.

"I said no! No leave me alone!"

"Miss," interrupts the cashier, "that'll be thirty dollars and forty-four cents."

"Oh, I'm sorry," the mother says. "Can you take out the yogurt please? I only have thirty dollars with me."

"No problem, Miss." The cashier figures out the new total. "That'll be twenty-nine dollars and eighty cents, then."

The mother gives her the money and leaves in a hurry. Not even giving the cashier time to say her usual "Have a nice day." She pulls her child into the car and fastens the seat belt around her daughter.

"Mommy, I just wanted one candy bar. Can't I even get a..."

SMACK--Her mother's hand stops her voice instantly. The child looks at her mom with horror, unable to utter another word.

"Oh my gosh!" her mother says. "What have I done? I'm sorry, Becky. I'm really sorry. It's just that this divorce and everything. I can't take it. I just can't take it."

She bursts out in tears, running her now gentle fingers through her child's hair. then her daughter puts her tiny arm around her mom's shoulder, patting her comfortably on the back.

"Mommy, I love you."

****

Norma Dodge

SISTERS

"Our Stella is growing up," smiled father as he watched his daughter carefully smoothing her dresss as she sat down to breakfast.

"Yes," said mother, "Stella is getting more like her sister Tracy every day. They are my two young ladies, but I don't think that Edna will ever grow up."

"I don't want to be a grown-up," Edna cried as she hurriedly slid into her chair. I want to run, and climb trees, and play ball forever!"

"And fight," Stella added with a very grown-up air of disapproval.

"Mind your own business," muttered Edna.

"Now, girls, don't quarrel. You had better hurry. You don't want to be late on the first day of school."

Edna ran down the street to catch up with her friends, while Tracy and Stella followed more sedately.

"Oh dear, I think Edna will never be a lady," sighed Tracy. Stella sighed too, and nodded her head in agreement. Then they forgot Edna as they hurried to school.

Stella found a seat between her two best friends, and until the bell rang, they chattered unceasingly. Josie's and Maggie's conversation seemed to deal mostly with boys, an interest they had developed over the summer.

The first day's classes were uneventful. Seventh grade work was not so different from last year's, after all, but everyone was anxious to be freed from their first day of long months of bondage. Shortly before the dismissal bell was to ring, disaster struck.

"P-s-st, Stella, pass this note to Maggie quick!" whispered Josie shoving a piece of folded paper into Stella's hand.

Stella took the note and turned to hand it to Maggie who sat on her other side.

As Maggie reached over, a hand swooped down and neatly plucked the note from Stella's fingers.

"Stella, stand up. I want everyone to see you while I read what you wrote in this note." The teacher's tone was grim. Opening up the paper, she read aloud, "'Do you like Frank Chetsfield?' Stella, I am shocked at you, writing notes about boys."

Again and again she read the words, 'Do you like Frank Chetsfield,' while Stella stood, head bowed in embarrassment, with tears of shame coursing down her cheeks.

Mercifully, the dismissal bell released her from her torture, and the teacher did not detain her as she ran from the room. (Perhaps even that flint-hearted spinster realized she had gone too far with her ridicule).

Tracy and Edna were waiting for Stella, and she ran up to them, sobbing out the whole story.

Edna's rage knew no bounds.

"Do you mean she let you stand there and take the blame? She didn't own up to writing the note herself?"

Suddenly they spied Josie running ahead of them. Edna let out a whoop and ran after her, jumping on her from behind. Both girls fell to the ground, with Edna on top, pummeling Josie as hard as she could all the while shrieking, "You mean thing. You let Stella take the blame! You mean old coward you!"

Josie managed to throw off her attacker and ran for dear life, sobbing threats of "I'm going to tell Mama."

"Edna, let her go, don't chase her," pleaded Stella as Edna jumped to her feet, ready to resume the battle.

"Didn't I make her run, Stella?" beamed Edna. "I guess I paid her back, didn't I?"

"Oh, Edna, you did pay her back. If Mama scolds you for fighting, I'll tell her all about it."

As they walked toward home, arm in arm, Stella whispered, "I'll never tease you again about being a tomboy. I guess we need a boy in this family.

****

Kristy Cahall

SPECIAL CHILD

Give him a chance
To show who he is.
Give the opportunity
To be all he can be.
Spare him some extra
Time to explain for
Words don't come so easy.
Find a little patience
To sit back and watch.
Show him you care and
A lot of love because
This special child is
Truly a gift from God.

****

Kim Vollmer

AND IN THE MORNING YOU WERE DEAD

I caught you last night,
in my big hands quivering
of too tight a hold.
I blew kisses to you
and froze as you shivered
and tickled me.
I hid you away so only I would know you.
I protected us from others.
I protected you from me,
behind the glass you sang out.
I covered your noises to protect us.
And I knew I'd gobble you up.
No. Not this one.
I'll save you
in my grape-jelly jar
lid-tight.

****

Kim Vollmer

DIM AND DARK

I, watching our love fade
dim and dark,
slowly lose ground and shape.
I, pressing hard against your chest,
hear the beating,
the melting of my soul.
Hold me.
Crying me.

****

Maria Mellinger

THE WHISPERS

The whispers
In the next room
Are popping my in ears
Like tired knuckles
Over a typewriter,
While my silence
Is a song to them,
Instrumental,
And they ruin it
With a lover's lyric.

****

Nels Nelson

IN MY ROOM

In my room at night,
It's 2:37 a.m., I think.
The clock could be a liar.
I am a liar.
I am a junkie.
Life is my junk.
I am junk.
Die, junkie.
Heroin can't be junk,
Too expensive.
Smiles and slaps could be junk, though;
People give them away.
They must have too many.
I will take them.
Come to me, candyman and woman.

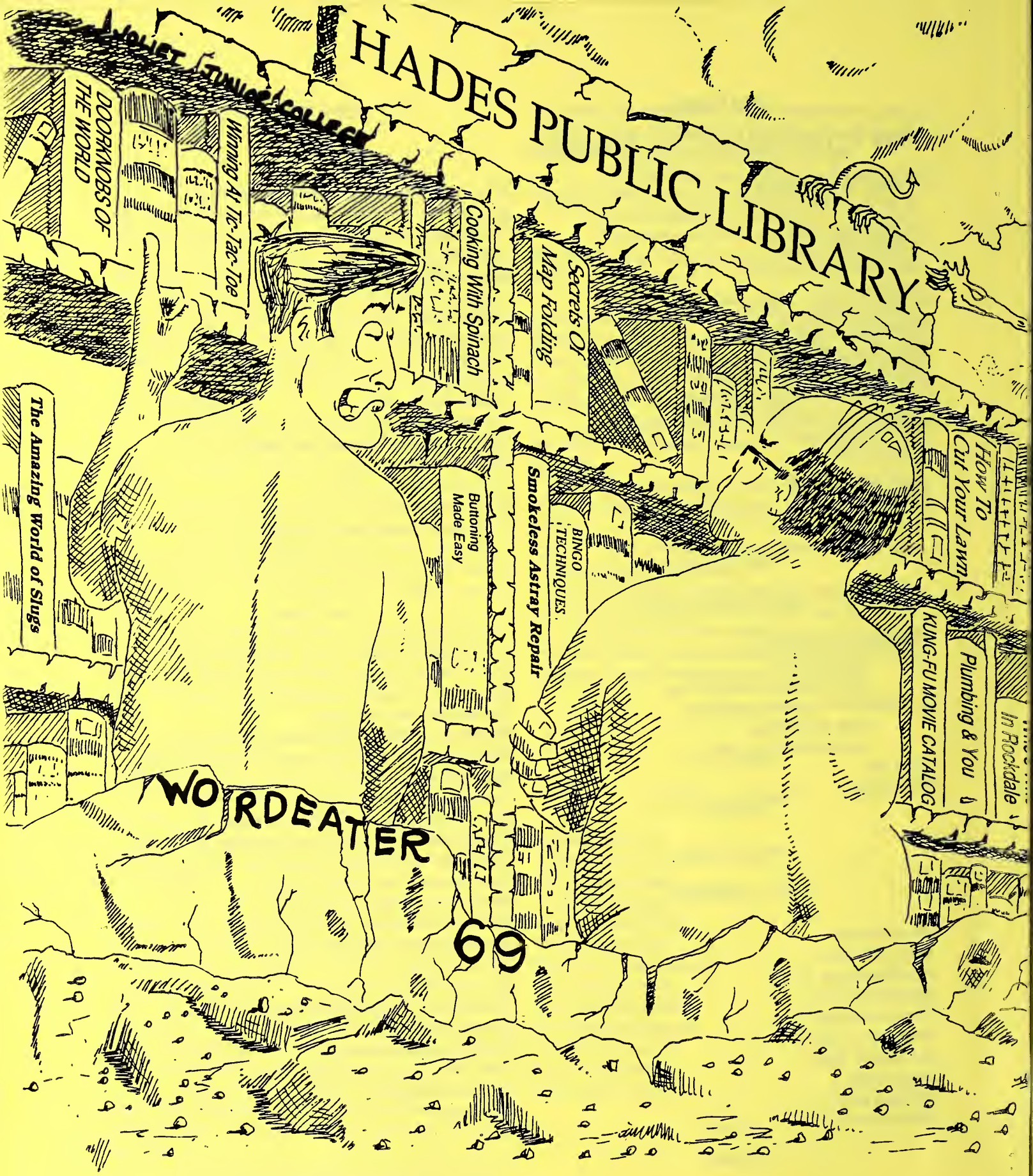
****

Nels Nelson

KISS, KISS, AND GOODNIGHT

She comes with black hair, red hair, mood hair,
Into his bed, when she wants.
She comes smelling of dirty music, thick whiskey,
Thin cigarettes which extend forever.She comes at two
or three in the morning,
Usually twice a week.
She comes to wake the child from dreams
Of homemade, after-school cookies and birthday parties,
To wake him from dreams of love-packed lunches
And meetings at the school bus stop
She turns on the lamp by his bed,
And crams her painted, smeared face into his.
She wants to play mommy, to read
A bedtime story.
"No, mom, I'm fine."
"Shut up, kid! I'm gonna read to you!"
He won't look at her.
She slurs through the story,
Leaves him to his dreams again.
Can he dream again?

****



"The Jim and Tammy Story," now I thought this place had a little more class than that.